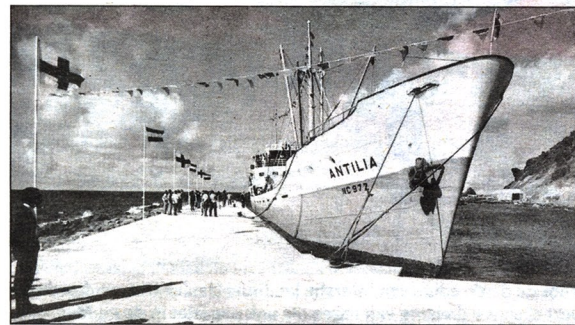


'To turn a rock'



De Antilia in de haven op 8 november 1972.

Dignitaries all, Ladies and Gentlemen, All present. It was my intention to speak off the cuff. However, considering that my address to the people of Saba contains historical references which can be used in future, I have decided to write it. I am here today in my position as a storyteller. Peter Handle said once that: „If a nation loses its storytellers, it loses its childhood”.

Door Will Johnson



Will Johnson

Today we are commemorating the building of a real harbor on Saba fifty years ago. I say a real harbor, because many years ago one of the magazines wrote an article on Saba and the title of the article was 'Harbor Master without a Harbor'. At that time Captain Samuel Augustus Simmons was the harbormaster. The impression should not be given that he had nothing to do. There were a number of things which had to be done and there were a number of schooners and other vessels calling here at the time.

On my Internet blog *The Saba Islander* I have many stories about that, and others related to the history of Saba. This was especially the case with the long-held wish of the people of Saba to have a decent harbor.

One of those articles posted on November 3rd, 2018 is the story of the Captain Leo Chance Pier. The newspaper *The Saba Herald* which was started on August 24th, 1968, was always hammering away at the need for a real harbor.

Futile efforts had been made in the past to build something. In 1935 the contractor Lionel Bernard Scot dynamited one of the large stones of the natural

barrier of large rocks which provided a bit of shelter for the small boats to bring passengers and cargo ashore. Somehow a wall was built to make a sort of sheltered landing. Even the newspaper on Sint Maarten 'De Slag om Slag' got involved and ridiculed what was going on and said that Saba was building a swimming pool. The first high seas took out the wall. My father was foreman for Mr. Scot at the time.

Another attempt was made in the nineteen-fifties to build a landing place by hand but that did not work either.

From the time Saba was settled the Fort Bay and the Ladder Bay were used to land cargo and passengers. I have written a number of articles from priests and doctors who arrived at Saba in the middle of the night and had to walk up through the gut by the Ladder Bay.

The Cove Bay was also used but to a lesser extent. I heard of cases as a young boy, from the old timers about the use of Cove Bay. One of them concerned my great-great-Grandmother Annie Martin de Clemencieux, whose father had come out to Statia from the Island of Madeira. Her intended husband was bringing the lumber on a raft to the Cove Bay and was drowned in the

process. She later married James Johnson Senior. I was able to confirm this in the old Roman Catholic journals.

In those same journals I found a note from 1911. Father Mulder was planning to build a church on Hell's Gate. The Journal states that 'many Roman Catholic Parishioners from Hell's Gate carried up the planks and rafters from Cove Bay to build this church'. Rumor has it that my grandfather James Horton Simmons who lived next to that church was the last Anglican holdout. The rumors claimed that Father Mulder had offered him a box of salt fish to become a Roman Catholic. When that article appeared in my column Under the Sea Grape Tree, Mr. Leo Chance called me laughing and said: „Hor-ton did not sell himself cheap. I remember as a boy going to Hell's Gate with my father Bertin Chance selling groceries and those boxes of salt fish were large and weighed a ton.”

As for the Ladder Bay. It was the most suitable anchorage for the schooners owned by Saba Captains. A good number of those captains lived at The Gap. When weather was approaching, they could run down through the Gut where the road was formerly located and get on

board their schooners quickly.

As for events leading up to the realization of this all-important project for Saba, I went through the old Saba Herald's for some data. In the January 24th, 1970 edition of the Herald we carried an article on the fact that Mr. Leo Chance had become a Minister.

On Monday January 26th, 1970, bids were entered for what was called the 'harbor dam'. There were three companies which entered bids. Back then the WIPM was getting ready to try and take over the government of Saba. The Saba Herald as spokesman for the party was on to everything. We recorded that the reception for the signing had cost the government 2,300 guilders. That 196 people had attended the one-hour ceremony and so it had cost 16,50 guilders per person. We related the reception to the fact that the nurses needed a better salary.

On June 25th, 1970, the Minister of Finance decided to grant the contract for the construction of the harbor dam to the South American Construction Company (Samco) for a total amount of 2,610,000 guilders. The Saba Herald records that Minister Leo Chance had called me to give me the good news.

The signing of the contract took place on Saturday, September 12th, 1970.

So, as you can see Minister Leo Chance moved this project forward at top speed and deserves all the credit for the naming of this project in his honor.

But as you know how much politicians are appreciated for what they do, I am ashamed to tell you that a few years later I found an article in the Saba Herald which stated 'Mr. Chance seems to have forgotten we, Lord, Mr. Chance, do something for your Saba people, man'. Of course, we needed money for the budget as we were in government by then.

The Government Information Bulletin and the Herald followed the developments step by step, but for this speech I will not go into details. Many of these are to be read on The Saba Islander.

On November 8th, 1972, I made a speech for the occasion which appeared in the Herald. I praised the Saba people who had worked on the job. Working up in those cliffs was not easy. Paddy Johnson reminded me that he and Wilfred Hassell were on the caisson which sunk coming from Sint Maarten and they nearly lost their lives. Eddie Peterson and Kenneth Every

and a number of other young men also worked on the construction here.

Finally November 8th, 1972, arrived. The Executive Council decided that considering the role which Mr. Chance had played in moving the project forward and getting it approved, to name it in his honor.

The Herald records that the M.V. Antilia tied up to the pier at 9am. This was done by Capt. Leo Chance himself. Following her were the tug the Lassue, the Motor Yacht, Wendy II, the Islander, Eureka, Lupo, Bommer- raoma, the Cricket III, all of these yachts were tied alongside the catwalk of the pier and the M.V. Antilia. Anchored away from the pier were the sloops the Island Pride of Capt. Mathew Levenston, and the Roselle of Captain Randolph Dunkin.

The other big development that helped to bring Saba into modern times of course was the

landing of the first plane landing at Flat Point by Mayor Remy de Haenen of St. Barth's on February 9th, 1959, and the opening of the airport on September 18th, 1963. In my photo collection I have the photos at Cove Bay of the M.V. Hertha towing in the barge to Cove Bay to land the equipment for Mr. Jacques Deldevert in 1962, and later the barge in 1974 coming into Cove Bay to carry back the equipment. It would be remiss of me not to mention the large role which then Commissioner Claude Wathey of Sint Maarten played in that project. I know because he had sent me to Saba to campaign for the DP party in the elections of 1962.

We cannot forget to mention the all-important role that Mr. Elmer Linzey and his aunt Mrs. Maude Othella Edwards played in bringing electricity to Saba and making 24 hour a day Electricity to Saba on December

31st, 1970. So, in a period of 15 years Saba had an airport, a real harbor and electricity, a newspaper, and the radio station the voice of Saba owned by Max Nicholson. These all-important projects to make the quality of life which we all take for granted today.

I will end with telling the story of 'To Turn a Rock'.

Life looked so hopeless that when many Sabans left Saba they would turn a rock at the Fort Bay swearing never to return to this rock. Don't ask me how it started but my cousin Carl Lester Johnson, who later became a Banker in New York, wrote an article in which he mentioned the following.

„Self-perception and the insights that shape our lives, come to us at the most unusual times. I clearly recall my first act of self-perception.

At the time I was a young man and living on Saba. It was during World War II and no ships had called to the island for quite a while. On that particular day, a ship had come in and brought the naked necessities of life. I had made five trips from Fort Bay to The Bottom, driving five donkeys; my sixth trip had been straight through to the Windward Side. When I was finished, I sat down on the path leading to our home. Suddenly, awareness came over me. I looked down at my hands and I became aware of myself as an individual. My extremely close relationships with friends and family stood aside and for the first time I became fully aware of Carl Lester Johnson as a per-



De ontvangst bij hoog bezoek.



Leo Chance, minister van de Nederlandse Antillen, bij de opening van de pier. Op een foto laat hij zien hoe het geworden is.



Met de nieuw aangelegde pier ging het allemaal wat soepeler.



Op een foto laat hij zien hoe het geworden is.

son, separate and distinct from all other persons. It was at this particular moment that I determined the direction that has led to where I am today. This decision was no grand design; it was the sum product of my heritage. You see, I had been educated to emigrate. This was an existential decision. It was a good decision; a decision which was the outgrowth of my cultural heritage. The heritage, so important in determining how we grow and how long we live.”

I never asked my cousin if he had turned a rock when he left Saba. In 1955 with the Alice flood I had a similar experience. I would carry three donkeys with cargo up to beyond the S. where Commissioner Arthur Anslyn would carry them further with his Jeep. My last trip would be all the way to Mr. Carl Hassell's store in Windward Side. I would be paid one guilder for each package of which 75 cents went to the owners of the donkeys and 25 cents to me. I remember Mr. Carl asking me: „Boy what are you going to do with all that money?”

I too decided at the age of 13 to go to Curaçao and get myself an education. I always promised to come back home someday and help to develop the island and its people to a higher standard. So, I did not intend to turn a rock.

People of Saba, look back with pride on what has been accomplished on Saba since the airport was built, this harbor, and quality electricity supply. Our compliments also to Mr. Chance who on November 8th

celebrated his 90th birthday. Also, we remember Eric Milton Johnson who recently made 90 and looks like 60. He was a member of the island Council and had a hand in trying to build a pier in the area by the old pier.

My thanks to Commissioner Bruce Zagers who reminded me that it was fifty years since this project was completed. He deserves great praise for the work he has been doing to get financing for a tourist harbor in the area called the black rocks and that too will be done.

I continue to educate myself, so that I can teach others.

I save things so that I can share them. In the case of events of fifty years ago and before this pier was built, I collected several hundred photos of the past. I am happy that these can now be used to show people, young and old how the situation on Saba used to be.

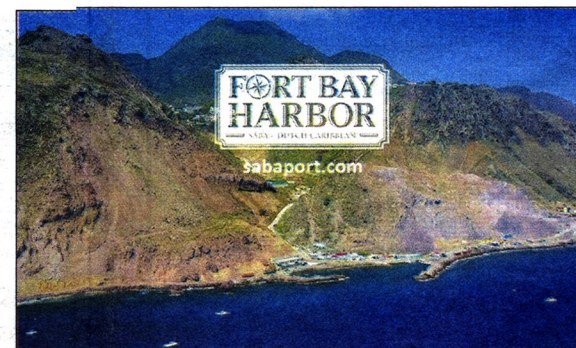
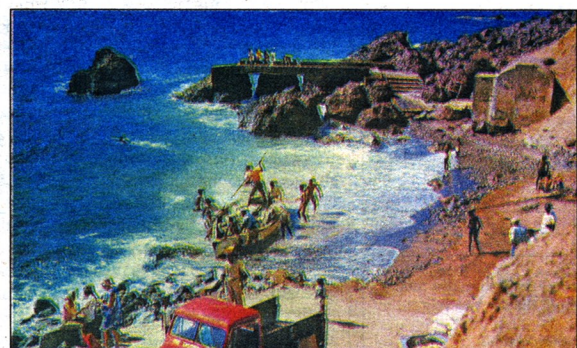
I end with the words of comfort of Pope John Paul II, for those who feel that the new harbor will make a great difference to the quality of life in a negative way. He advised the world 'Be not afraid'. Be not afraid. And his message of hope I want to pass on to you today.

Be not afraid. Thank you.

Deze toespraak hield Will Johnson, voormalig politicus op Saba - het kleinste eiland van het Caribisch deel van het Koninkrijk - op 13 november 2022, ter gelegenheid van het feit dat het vijftig jaar geleden is dat de pier op het eiland officieel in gebruik werd genomen. Een belangrijke mijlpaal destijds.



Zonder pier moesten de bootjes op deze manier aanlanden en passagiers en goederen aan land brengen.



Zo ziet de haven er nu uit.